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### Augustine and the Nature of Divine Love

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# Memory, Meaning & Faith

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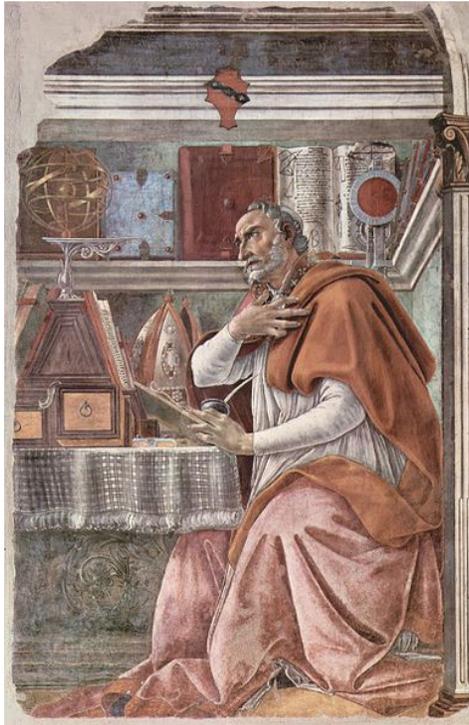
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November 05, 2010

## Augustine and the Nature of Divine Love

By John C. Peckham (Southwestern Adventist University, Religion Department)



Augustine is representative of the classic view of divine love as unaffected, unilateral, indifferent, and wholly subjective, beneficence. He writes, “In what way then does He [God] love us? As objects of use or as objects of enjoyment? If He enjoys us, He must be in need of good from us, and no sane man will say that; for all the good we enjoy is either Himself, or what comes from Himself . . . He does not enjoy us then, but makes use of us. For if He neither enjoys nor uses us, I am at a loss to discover in what way He can love us.” Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.31.34 (NPNF, 1109). For Augustine, “to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one’s disposal to obtain what one desires . . .” *Augustine*, 1.4.4 (NPNF, 1090). Even in Augustine’s view of use love (*uti*) God does not love any external goodness, but only his own goodness. In God’s use of humans there is “no reference to His own advantage, but to ours only; and, so far as He is concerned, has reference only to His goodness.” *Augustine*, 1.32 (NPNF, 1109-1110). “But neither does He use after our fashion of using. For when we use objects, we do so with a view to the full enjoyment of the goodness of God. God, however, in His use of us, has reference to His own goodness.” *Augustine*, 1.32.35 (NPNF 2:1109).

### Questions

- Is God impassible, that is, unable to be affected by any external stimuli? Does God enter into real, mutual, relationship with human beings?
- Can God’s life be improved or, conversely, worsened, by the actions of other agents? Is it possible for God to take delight in, or enjoy, his creatures?
- What are the potential implications for one’s conception of God and the divine-human relationship if Augustine’s perspective is accurate?

Posted by [Angelika Kaiser](#) on November 05, 2010 in [Church History](#), [Historical Theology](#), [Quotable](#) | [Permalink](#)

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